

1: Holmberg--20 [7]

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

116, 751, 826, 302

"The disposition of hair clippings varies with age. In the case of young children the hair is saved, wrapped in cotton string, covered with hot beeswax, and tied around the neck of the child or his mother. The purpose of this is to promote the future growth of the child's hair and also to prevent the child from becoming sick in the head. In the case of adults the hair is thrown away deep in the bush, although I also observed in Casarabe that it was sometimes buried in the ground just outside of the house. Informants told me that leaving old hair around was apt to cause headache. Nail clippings receive no special treatment."

"The skulls of the ancestors are preserved and carried around for a while as a protection from disease and death. They are also sometimes used in curing. No set rule determines whether a skull will be saved or thrown away. There is, however, a tendency to throw away old skulls as new deaths (and consequently new skulls) appear in the family, and there is also a proneness to save only the skulls of people greatly loved, such as young children, or of important personages in the family, such as great hunters or chiefs. Many mothers whom I knew in Tibaera were carrying around the skulls of infants who had died not long before. They all told me that they were apt to be sick if they did not follow this custom. In one family which I knew, the skull of a chief called Embutáundu (Father-of-Bearded-one), had been carried around by one of his daughters for many years. Whenever any member of her family was ill, this skull was employed to effect a cure. On one occasion I walked into the house and found Nyéka, a son-in-law of the deceased Embutáundu, 'sick in the chest.' He told me that he had an abačik-waia (evil spirit) in his chest which was causing him great pain. I asked him how he was going to cure his ailment. He picked up the skull of Embutáundu, rubbed it across his chest for a few minutes, and then replied, 'Tomorrow, I will not be sick.' "